

Concordia Student Union

Union étudiante de Concordia



CONCORDIA STUDENT UNION CONDEMNS DRACONIAN AND DUBIOUS MORATORIUM

(09/23/02) -- The Concordia Student Union (CSU) condemns , in the strongest terms, the Concordia Board of Governor's decision to ban all Israel-Palestine-related activities on campus, to ban on all student club activity on the Mezzanine and in the lobby, the two vital areas of student life, and to grant Concordia Rector Frederick Lowy draconian powers to crack down on students that break these measures. The "cooling-off period" represents a blatant violation of students' right to free speech and assembly, as well as the school's own policies that affirm the right of due process to all. Further, it will only serve to inflame the campus tensions that the administration attempts to mitigate.

We express this with deep disappointment, particularly given the fact that it will serve to undermine the efforts that the CSU executive and the administration had made thus far on easing these tensions. Our first step in this process was our cancellation of a planned lecture by Norman Finkelstein, who was to speak on the Israel-Palestine issue as part of CSU Orientation week. At our initiative, we held and a public forum in conjunction with the administration, entitled "Free Speech, Tolerance and Diversity: Where do we go from here?", a university-wide discussion on easing the divisive atmosphere on campus. In participating in this event with us, we were under the impression that the administration had agreed that the only way to bring a climate of civility and tolerance was to discuss the issues openly, to bring all sides together, to listen to each other. Although by no means the only solution, we saw it as a very important first step.

Sadly, the university's actions have made very clear that our impressions were unfounded, in fact blatantly so. We call on them to reverse this decision immediately, both for the sake of respecting the basic principles of free speech and natural justice, and, further, to avoid the practical consequences that such a reactionary and dubious measure will provoke. The anger and emotions that we saw on September 9th will not go away by denying them the right to be heard.

We renew our pledge with the university to engage in efforts at mediation and reconciliation. This includes, but is not limited to, the facilitation of an open meeting group for pro-Israel and pro-Palestine students to meet and discuss how they can come to express their conflicting views in a peaceful atmosphere. We also propose the establishment of an intra-university committee, comprised of student, staff, faculty, and administration representatives to deal with the growing complaints of anti-Arab and anti-Jewish discrimination that both sides have been complaining of.

We also join with a wide variety of groups both inside and outside the university that have been calling for a full public inquiry into the events of September 9th. One important issue among many to be addressed is how the safety of thousands of students was put at risk by Rector Frederick Lowy's decision to permit the appearance of a speaker that the school's own security director and Vice Rector had been warning against. We agree with the Concordia University Part Time Faculty Association that "Dr. Lowy owes the university community and the CSU an apology" for "doing nothing about our safety on September 9 – the contrary in fact." Indeed, a true attempt at restoring civility and security on campus would begin with an inquiry into the university's own foolish decisions, not this callous attempt to punish students for the (predictable) consequences that these decisions caused.



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Statement on Moratorium

Ralph Lee, CSU Vice President Academic

In response to the unfortunate events that occurred on Sept 9th, the Board of Governors and the university administration have responded by invoking measures which are not acceptable in any free and democratic society. The administration has decided to revoke our constitutional rights to free speech and expression, as well as freedom of assembly. All of these rights and freedoms are guaranteed in the Canadian charter of rights and freedoms. The administration has banned the right of student groups, clubs, faculty associations and anyone else from setting up tables in the main lobby and the second floor mezzanine. Concordia has over 200 groups and clubs that rely on tables and exhibits to promote student life and their respective organizations. The administration has gone even further with regards to the Israel-Palestine conflict. No students can publicly gather and discuss the issue nor can they put up posters relating to that issue. These new laws are more suited for a totalitarian regime rather than a public university in Canada.

Amnesty international as well as countless other organizations have condemned this shameful attack on our fundamental freedoms. A university is a place where ideas and debates, even around controversial issues, must be allowed to take place. The Concordia Student Union calls upon all students who believe in a free society to take part in a peaceful rally next Monday in front of Bishops Court to send a message to the administration that they cannot over-ride our rights as they are written in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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